

CHAPTER 10 INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, stock is taken of what all the theoretical points of departure, investigation and findings, covered in the previous chapters, point to. In this way, the various parts of the study are integrated and concluded. The main aspects, addressing this objective, are structured into the following sections and contents:

- Section 10.1, summarising how well the findings, reached through hypothesis testing, align with the theoretical foundations of the study, and indicating the required reformulations;
- Section 10.2, describing the practical contribution, value and implications of the study;
- Section 10.3, providing a critical evaluation of the more technical aspects of the study, including methodology, measuring instruments, sampling, and data analysis;
- Section 10.4, making recommendations about future research, dissemination and implementation; and
- Section 10.5, comprising a concluding statement.

The core deficiencies in our present research knowledge in the field under study are identified early in Chapter 5 (statement of the research problem) as theoretical, methodological and empirical in nature.

In the relevant sections below, as introduced above, it is shown how the study largely succeeded in addressing the concerns:

- at the level of theory, in its actual underpinning by theory, and its avoidance of pertinent (male) research biases by involving male and female participants, while acknowledging a life-development perspective;
- at the level of methodology and design, in its achievement of a sample of homosexual and heterosexual participants, and application of a range of appropriate statistical procedures, albeit in a cross-sectional, instead of a longitudinal design, that would be more preferable, but was not practically possible;
- at the level of the findings, in its production of useful, largely consistent findings across its scope.

10.1 Outcomes of hypothesis testing in terms of theoretical foundations

An interpretive overview is pursued, relative to two purposes. The first purpose is to show and evaluate the correspondence between the findings of this study and the theoretical structure(s) or model underpinning the research, thereby reaching a conclusion about the areas of theory best informed by the findings (see Section 10.1.1). Second, the resulting degree of correspondence informs the consideration of adjustments or refinements to the theoretical framework of the study (see Section 10.1.2), to better describe the nature of the interaction between sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction. From this, future research can be gleaned.

10.1.1 Summary and evaluation of findings in terms of theory

In this section, reference is again made to the schematic representations of the theoretical foundations of the study, which have subsequently driven all data collection and analyses. These structures are presented in Figure 2.2 (relationship satisfaction¹ congruence theory) and Figure 3.1 (dyadic relationship outcomes theory). (Also see the accompanying text in Section 2.3.2, and the early part of Chapter 6.)

Figure 2.2 presents the possible sex-role identity configurations that could exist for the two partners of a particular couple. However, this structure essentially only provides for comparing the ~~(in)congruence~~ patterns of sex-role identity ~~traits~~ of a couple, and the association of these patterns with relationship satisfaction, as derived from dyadic and some partly-dyadic analyses. By following this theoretical approach, and by selecting only the significant findings² of the present study, the following have been revealed:

At the dyadic level

- Among heterosexual respondents, identical (~~congruent~~) sex-role identity traits (both) are associated more closely than the identical-femininity mixed pattern, with couples' (high) relationship satisfaction.
- Among all female and all homosexual (combined) respondents, the ~~identical-femininity mixed~~ pattern is associated more closely than sex-role identity trait congruence, with couples' (high) relationship satisfaction.
- Among heterosexual respondents, sex-role identity trait ~~congruence~~ is associated more closely than the identical-masculinity mixed pattern, with couples' (high) relationship satisfaction.

At the partly-dyadic level³

- Among lesbian respondents, as well as homosexual respondents combined, the ~~identical-femininity mixed~~ pattern is associated more closely than congruent sex-role identity traits, with partners' (high) personal relationship satisfaction.
- Among heterosexual female respondents, ~~congruent~~ sex-role identity traits are associated more closely than the identical-femininity mixed pattern, with partners' (high) personal relationship satisfaction.
- Among lesbian respondents, as well as homosexual respondents (all combined), the ~~identical-masculinity mixed~~ pattern is associated more closely than sex-role identity trait congruence, with partners' (high) personal relationship satisfaction.
- Among heterosexual male and heterosexual female respondents, sex-role identity trait ~~congruence~~ is associated more closely than the identical-masculinity mixed pattern, with partners' (high) personal relationship satisfaction.
- Among lesbian respondents, as well as homosexual respondents combined, the ~~identical-femininity mixed~~ pattern is associated more closely than sex-role identity trait incongruence, with partners' (high) personal relationship satisfaction.

¹ Or sex-role identity, for that matter

² All references to the 1%- and 5%-levels of significance are omitted, but findings from both are included hence.

³ Only sex-role identity is treated as a dyadic variable, i.e., as a pattern for every particular couple.

- Among heterosexual respondents combined, sex-role identity trait ~~incongruence~~ is associated more closely than the identical-femininity mixed pattern, with partners' (high) personal relationship satisfaction.
- Among male respondents and heterosexual respondents, sex-role identity trait ~~incongruence~~ is associated, more closely than the identical-masculinity mixed pattern, with partners' personal relationship satisfaction.

However, many more comparisons are possible, when considering the ~~highest~~ adaptive sex-role identity type in at least one partner of a couple (as hinted at by Basow (1992) under 2.3.1), as well as considering whether or not partners or individuals are happier when they have ~~identical~~ sex-role identity types (for example, androgyny, or masculinity, or any of the other two in common), relative to the other mixed configurations. The following significant findings have been made in this regard:

At the dyadic level

- Among all respondents, couples experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when the ~~highest~~ adaptive sex-role identity type of at least one partner is ~~androgyny~~ (compared to masculinity).
- Among homosexual respondents, couples experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when the highest adaptive sex-role identity type of at least one partner is androgyny (compared to both being undifferentiated).
- Among all respondents (combined) and heterosexual respondents (combined), couples experience higher relationship satisfaction when the highest adaptive sex-role identity type of at least one partner is ~~femininity~~ (compared to masculinity).
- Among homosexual respondents, couples experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when the highest adaptive sex-role identity type of at least one partner is femininity (compared to both being undifferentiated).
- Among all respondents, couples experience higher relationship satisfaction when ~~both~~ are ~~feminine~~ (compared to both being undifferentiated).
- Among all respondents, couples experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are ~~androgynous~~ (compared to both being undifferentiated).
- Among all respondents (combined) and heterosexual respondents (combined), couples experience higher relationship satisfaction when both are ~~feminine~~ (compared to both being masculine).
- Among all respondents, couples experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are androgynous (compared to other non-identical sex-role identity type/trait combinations).
- Among all respondents (combined) and heterosexual respondents (combined), couples experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are ~~feminine~~ (compared to other non-identical sex-role identity type/trait combinations).
- Among heterosexual respondents, couples experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are feminine (compared to identical-masculinity mixed sex-role identity trait combinations).

- Among homosexual respondents, couples experience significantly lower relationship satisfaction when both are undifferentiated (compared to other non-identical sex-role identity type/trait combinations).

At the partly-dyadic level

- Among all respondents, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when the **highest** adaptive sex-role identity type of at least one partner is ~~androgyny~~ (compared to masculinity). The same applies in the cases of female and heterosexual respondents combined each time.
- Among all respondents, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when the highest adaptive sex-role identity type of at least one is androgyny (compared to both being undifferentiated). The same applies in the cases of female respondents and homosexual respondents combined each time.
- Among all respondents, heterosexual male respondents combined, male respondents combined, and heterosexual respondents combined, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when the highest adaptive sex-role identity of at least one partner is ~~femininity~~ (compared to masculinity).
- Among all respondents, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when the highest adaptive sex-role identity type of at least one partner is femininity (compared to both being undifferentiated). The same applies in the case of homosexual respondents (combined).
- Among heterosexual respondents, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when **both** are ~~feminine~~ (compared to both being androgynous).
- Among all respondents, individuals experience higher relationship satisfaction when both are ~~androgynous~~ (compared to both being masculine).
- Among all respondents combined, and female respondents combined, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are androgynous (compared to both being undifferentiated). The same applies to homosexual respondents.
- Among all respondents combined, and heterosexual respondents combined, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are ~~feminine~~ (compared to both being masculine).
- Among all respondents combined, female respondents combined, and homosexual respondents combined, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are feminine (compared to both being undifferentiated).
- Among all respondents and sub-groups, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are androgynous (compared to other non-identical sex-role identity type/trait combinations).
- Among all respondents and sub-groups, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are ~~feminine~~ (compared to other non-identical sex-role identity type/trait combinations).
- Among all respondents, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when they have ~~non-identical~~ sex-role identity type/trait combinations (compared to both being masculine). Heterosexual respondents combined, form an exception.

- Among all respondents, individuals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when they have non-identical sex-role identity trait combinations (compared to both being undifferentiated). Heterosexual respondents combined, and heterosexual males, form exceptions.
- With only a few exceptions in the case of sub-groups, almost all respondents experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when both are ~~feminine~~, or both are androgynous (compared to identical-femininity mixed or identical-masculinity mixed sex-role identity trait combinations).
- With only a few exceptions in the case of sub-groups, almost all respondents experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction when being in ~~identical-femininity mixed~~ or ~~identical-masculinity mixed~~ sex-role identity trait combinations (compared to both being masculine, or both being undifferentiated).

The annotation in the previous paragraphs is structured on purpose to highlight the imbalance between the 10 significant findings (three at the dyadic and seven at the partly-dyadic level) observed when following the comparative theoretical structure for sex-role identity trait (in)congruence and relationship satisfaction (in)congruence, and the 26 findings (11 dyadic and 15 partly-dyadic) observed when going beyond that structure. **This difference suggests that relationship satisfaction can be predicted more often and more strongly when predictions are not only based on (non-)identical / (in)congruent sex-role identity traits.**

In addition to the gains already noted, other partly-dyadic⁴ and non-dyadic effects⁵ have been anticipated and studied in accordance with the theoretical structure proposed as Figure 3.1. Sections 9.3.1 and 9.4 sufficiently detail the findings in this regard. Only the significant partly-dyadic findings are annotated and comprise the following:

- Among heterosexual respondents, personal ~~androgyny~~ is associated more closely than masculinity with couples' (high) relationship satisfaction.
- Among homosexual respondents, personal androgyny is associated more closely than an undifferentiated sex-role identity type with couples (high) relationship satisfaction.
- Personal ~~femininity~~ is more closely associated than masculinity with couples (high) relationship satisfaction among heterosexual male respondents, and among heterosexual respondents in general.
- Personal femininity is more closely associated than an undifferentiated sex-role identity type with couples' (high) relationship satisfaction among lesbian, heterosexual male, and (all) homosexual respondents.

Personal and partner's relationship satisfaction has also been related, consistent with other findings, to personal sex-role identity types and couples' dyadic sex-role identity combinations during inter-partner analyses.

⁴ Only relationship satisfaction is treated as dyadic, i.e., as a joint satisfaction pattern for every particular couple.

⁵ Sex-role identity type influences relationship satisfaction at a personal level.

What is more, the theoretical structure of Figure 3.1 has underpinned many findings on the role of extraneous factors with regard to sex-role identity, relationship satisfaction, and the association between the latter two. Section 9.5 comprises the detailed report in this regard. In addition, to distinguish more clearly between interactions or combinations of variables at stake during research, Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 were derived from Figure 3.1. The findings reported in Sections 9.2 to 9.5 can all be related with ease to exact positions on any of the relevant three diagrammatic presentations. These findings also represent quite comprehensive coverage of the complete range of possible relations between variables and influences by factors.

10.1.2 Theory reformulation and refinement

The discussion so far implies that the dyadic relationship satisfaction congruence theory does not deserve too much prominence as basis for research in the field, because its use has guided the present study towards relatively few useful findings. It is also suggested that, should it be used for specific purposes, it be titled more precisely and descriptively as the “dyadic sex-role identity trait congruence theory”, or, alternatively, the “theory of congruence of dyadic sex-role identity traits and relationship satisfaction”. The main reason for this suggestion is that the extended model, addressed immediately below, better takes into account dyadic relationship satisfaction combinations, and the multitude of factors having an impact on them. In contrast, sex-role identity trait combinations function as a small sub-set of these factors or dynamics.

The broader theoretical framework, originally proposed as the dyadic relationship outcomes theory, is able to support the bulk of the significant findings. The most significant predictor of dyadic relationship satisfaction, beyond reasonable doubt at this stage, appears to be the presence of particular sex-role identity types within at least one partner of a couple. These types act as highest adaptive behavioural repertoires for the couple as a dyad (and also for individual partners), and are followed by the strength of certain paired, identical sex-role identity types between partners. This recognition suggests amending the title of the theory.

It is proposed that the theory be referred to as the “**adaptive femininity trait theory**”. This title is not only appealing because it is succinct, but also reflects many important dimensions.

- The first is that ~~femininity~~ is the core sex-role identity trait common to both femininity and androgyny as sex-role identity types important to relationship satisfaction.
- The second is the essential importance of femininity as trait (and/or femininity and androgyny as sex-role identity types) as essential for ~~at least one partner~~ in a couple to ensure high levels of relationship satisfaction for that couple.
- The third is the strength of femininity as trait when partners have ~~identical~~ femininity or androgyny as sex-role identity type in common.
- The fourth is the power of femininity (as trait and type), and of androgyny, to determine ~~personal and dyadic relationship satisfaction~~.
- The fifth is the dynamic ability of femininity and androgyny to act as either an individual sex-role identity factor, or as a ~~dyadic one through sex-role identity combinations~~ between partners, because the dynamic is not limited to a trait-congruence approach.

As mentioned earlier, the diagrammatic presentation of the theory is no different than the structures presented as Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 in Chapter 4. As a result, they will not be repeated here. However, the new, slightly amended contents discussed in Section 10.1 have to be read into the diagrams. In essence, this implies reducing the prominence of the original thinking about dyadic relationship satisfaction (or sex-role identity trait) (in)congruence when focusing on the dynamics originating from the blocks in the centre bottom position. Instead, this thinking has to be replaced with an acknowledgement of the more nuanced functioning of sex-role identity type/trait combinations and configurations, which also entail the highest adaptive presence of sex-role identity type in at least one partner in a couple, identical sex-role identity types between partners, and the relative functioning of the latter compared to mixed (non-identical) sex-role identity trait combinations.

A final, important implication of this proposal is that the terminology and organisation of constructs presented as Table 2.2 also lose some prominence, at least in as far as approaching the relevant variables with reference to identical and non-identical sex-role identity trait patterns (i.e., from the left side of the diagram, in the rows). The strong need for organising one's thinking and research data into this specific dichotomy, has waned. However, the table does not lose its explanatory power when approaching it through the terms referring to satisfaction and dissatisfaction (i.e., from the top, through the columns). Whenever a combination of factors, be they sex-role identity combinations or others, contributes to relationship satisfaction (or do not do so), one can draw on possible dynamic explanations to understand why, in line with the suggested terminology proposed in Table 2.2.

The implication remains that some **identicalness** between partners, albeit no longer in terms of sex-role identity ~~traits~~, but more at the level of sex-role identity ~~types~~, and perhaps even more so in terms of diverse relationship preferences, can be experienced as correspondent, or as competitive, thus leading to experiences of either accord or discord. For example, under different circumstances, or for different sub-groups in terms of sexual orientation, and against more liberal or conservative value backgrounds, both too much and too little femininity among two partners can be detrimental to their satisfaction, hypothetically speaking. At the other end, therefore, when the sex-role identity type of two partners is **different**, it can either be fulfilling to learn from each other, or cause a great risk of them living separate lives, thus rendering such relationships either examples of having successfully adapted and accepted differences as complementary, or of remaining incompatible and in conflict through not accepting the situation, again depending on values, preferences, orientation, and the like.

The final aspect touched upon above, receives more attention in Section 10.4, as a need for further refinement and coverage in future studies has been signalled.

10.2 Practical contribution and implications of the findings

The likely gains from the present study are theory development and knowledge production (see Section 1.3).

At the ~~theoretical~~ level, testing out new theoretical frameworks has been considered the primary aim of the study in Section 6.1. The final result in this regard has just been explained in the previous section. It has been argued and shown that strong theoretical points of departure directed the collection of empirical data, which have been evaluated against preset hypotheses. This circular process, as it should be, resulted in revisiting the initial points of departure. As a consequence of this, improvements and refinements have been made to the original theoretical position. The changes mainly comprise moving away from a somewhat dualistic theory to a much more succinct and coherent, but still comprehensive, single or unitary theory. Many gains and refinements, in terms of methods and sampling, for instance, followed in the wake of these processes. Not least of these are the attempts at and successes in retaining both a dyadic and an individual focus with regard to the measurement and evaluation of relationship satisfaction outcome. Another feat is the balance of participants in terms of sexual orientation (homosexual and heterosexual) and sex (female and male) in filling some of the knowledge gaps pointed out in Section 5.1. In Section 10.3, the research processes and outcomes are evaluated more critically.

In terms of ~~knowledge production~~, a wide range of domains has been covered. Many participants, stakeholder groups, beneficiaries and mediators may benefit from the study. They span the academic, theoretical and professional areas of science, knowledge and practice. They cover, in particular, applications through the disciplines of psychology, social work, and education. They suggest therapy, prevention, and counselling as modes of application. They presuppose individuals, couples and groups of people as direct clients.

Attention is drawn next to the most important or central findings and knowledge that should be put to work to benefit people in their close relationships. Foremost is **the realisation that homosexual and heterosexual couples both have a strong capacity to succeed in close relationships and achieve satisfaction**. The dynamics they experience are more common than different to them. It is evident in the comparable level of happiness achieved by each. In terms of frequencies, 68 % of heterosexual, almost all or 95 % of gay (note the small sample size again), and over half or 55% of lesbian respondents achieved a happiness level above the cut-off point used in this study (8.2.4). In terms of mean *DAS* scores, heterosexual respondents achieved 114,7, gay respondents 122,5, and lesbian respondents 112,8 (ANOVA not significant). More importantly, what even these statistics do not tell, but what has emerged from detailed analyses, especially during between-group comparisons, is a very large similarity of trends and dynamics. They include the similar high value placed on androgyny and femininity, compared to other sex-role identity types, as the highest adaptive behavioural repertoire for couples and individual partners. Then follows the high value of identical androgyny or femininity for partners in couples (under 9.2.3.1 shown to be a very strong similarity). In addition, there is the greater value of non-identical sex-role identity types, compared to identical masculinity, and, under special conditions, identical femininity traits. Lastly, there is the relatively higher predictive value of the adaptive and identicalness models above the one postulating congruent traits. The abovementioned evidence confirms that homosexual and heterosexual relationships largely function the same in most of the important aspects.

Although much fewer in number, some of the differences emerging from the analyses are no less important to know for people in close couples. A clear trend emerged aligning the functioning patterns of heterosexual female respondents closer to those of lesbian respondents, and sometimes also of all homosexual respondents combined, than to the dominant patterns for heterosexual couples. This in particular applies to the stronger role of an identical femininity sex-role identity trait compared to congruent traits, for homosexual and lesbian respondents, and the inverse stronger role of congruent traits, compared to femininity (and also masculinity), for heterosexual respondents, especially males. The functioning patterns of heterosexual males are closer to those of heterosexual respondents (combined). A final difference emerged for lesbian partners, which is the only sub-group for which an identical masculinity trait plays a more important role than congruent sex-role identity traits. Therefore, this study produced **no scientific evidence towards treating homosexual and heterosexual relationships differently**, as if they were two worlds apart. They are more similar than different, confirming the detail of an early finding by Schreurs (1993b), that lesbian partners in many senses have more in common with heterosexual females than with gay men (under 2.3.1).

Particularly noteworthy is the observation that partners with an identical undifferentiated sex-role identity type consistently experience low relationship satisfaction. It begs the question about the ability of Erikson's theory of epigenetic development to explain the relationship between the unresolved identity and intimacy crises, and sex-role identity type, also implied by Harrington-Hill (1992) (under 4.2.4 and 4.3.2). The somewhat tentative suggestion, based on some empirical findings, is that the resolution of those crises would lead someone to exhibit more of the functionality associated with the sex-role identity trait of femininity, with all its strengths of nurturance, communication, empathy and relationship building. In particular, it is assumed that the successful resolution of the identity crisis enables achievement of intimacy. However, one caveat has to be sounded. According to Bem's (1993) conceptualisation of the lenses of gender, an undifferentiated sex-role identity type is not mainly, or even at all, symptomatic of a poorly developed or defined identity, but the result of the (lack of) salience with which an individual perceive and respond to stereotypes. This characteristic could theoretically be quite desirable, as a post-stereotypical, potentially very powerful and liberating characteristic. The lack of strong and consistent findings point to the opposite, and more research is called for on this issue.

Then there is the highly informative discovery about the conundrum or enigma (or dilemma) pertaining to heterosexual females, who seem to be caught between their own "progress" and their husbands' "traditional" position. The core dynamic is that wives' undifferentiated sex-role identity type is good (better) for their husbands but not (than for) themselves, while their androgyny or femininity is good for themselves, but not their husbands (reported under 9.4). Couples need to acknowledge the effects of so being trapped in two worlds.

Particular programme (see just further below) objectives should include some or all of the following:

- Focusing on the identification and removal of the negative effects of stereotypes and stereotyping.

- More freely accepting the wide range of values and preferences, and fully workable relationship arrangements that can be based on them.
- Achieving more flexibility in terms of increased societal challenges brought about by new role definitions and dynamics.
- Gaining insight into and finding the motivation towards establishing better ways to enable both partners in a couple to achieve optimal functioning in terms of each one's career and home/family roles.
- Embracing homo- and heterogender (sex-role identity based), rather than homo- and heterosexual (biological sex based) thinking, instead of adhering to convention and tradition, for its own sake.

The knowledge produced has to be made valuable through ~~preventive~~ applications. Many professional practitioners should help prepare their clients and audiences for an important and substantive part of their lives using the insights documented through the study. What comes to mind most directly are the development and delivery of community-based life-skills programmes, psycho-education in structured or institutional settings, counselling services at schools and tertiary-education institutions, support materials for the new learning area for life skills in the revised national education curriculum, materials developed for and used by practitioners in the world of work, mainly through employee assistance programmes, and guidelines and programmes under the auspices of religious communities and churches. It is recommended that national departments and provincial government services in the areas of health, education and labour, in particular, take note of the findings and consider possible opportunities for implementation. The youth should be singled out as target group.

In terms of counselling and therapeutic services, the relevant practitioners, such as clinical, counselling, industrial and educational psychologists, social workers, registered marital and family therapists, life-line counsellors, and other professionals, should note the findings and expect to be called upon to help individuals or couples in distress when they require help with the problems they experience in their close dyadic relationships.

In terms of direct benefits and beneficiaries, many insights can be derived from the findings of the study and passed on through intervention programmes, counselling, and therapy to clients, so that they can prepare themselves better for living in close relationships over many years, or remove obstacles preventing them from achieving optimal relationship satisfaction. Not least of the above, could be the enhanced ability of individuals to make informed, correct choices when entering into long-term periods of close commitment to partners, understanding the complementary and/or competitive dynamics originating from the identicalness or difference underlying sex-role identity types and many related factors, and making best use of opportunities to gain access to the largest possible repertoire of behaviour related to sex-role identity.

10.3 Critical evaluation of the study

The value, and more particularly, any assumed shortcomings of the present study in terms of method, sampling, measurement instruments, and procedures for analysis, are reviewed next. Revisiting the summary of 19 shortcomings attached to previous studies, has been helpful at this point (see Section 4.4). Appropriate themes are picked up from there and dealt with where relevant as part of the four sections following hereafter.

10.3.1 Methodology

Within the limitations of scope, duration, budget and human resources, typically imposed by doctoral research, as substantive a study as possible has been attempted, and hopefully achieved. Special reference is made in this regard to the comprehensive theoretical basis of the study, which has been achieved through a broad and in-depth literature review. Along with the explicit theoretical position derived in this manner, a thorough understanding of the nature and extent of existing methodologies, research instrumentation, and analysis techniques has been gained at the outset, not to forget the mere overview of research findings as such. An almost automatic gain at this stage has also been a thorough conceptualisation of constructs, which have been related both to the requirements of theory, but also those of practical situations (see Sections 3.2.2 and 5.2.6).

As a result, it has been possible to conduct the study in essence as theory-driven work (see Section 3.3.3). Another related, and important, strength of the study has been its subsequent success in accommodating and focusing on the interpersonal or dyadic aspects of relationships, as called for in Sections 2.4 and 5.2.2.

In addition, it is submitted that the present study also succeeded in avoiding the trap of limiting its focus to male and/or heterosexual participants, to which many other studies in psychology succumb, thus heeding the warnings formulated in Section 5.1. As a result, homosexual and female respondents have participated freely, in balanced numbers with male and heterosexual respondents, to ensure realistic comparisons.

Furthermore, only respondents in the reality of close relationships of at least two years have participated, in response to the alerts recorded in Sections 3.3.1, 5.1.5, and 5.2.3 to avoid simulation or laboratory studies.

As stated in the opening sentences of this section, the present work by definition had to be a one-off, limited, and focused project. This fact resulted in one main disadvantage. The research had to remain cross-sectional and correlational, affording only one opportunity to sample a number of respondents, collect the required information, and analyse that in relation to itself, so to speak. Unfortunately, this approach precludes work of a more experimental or longitudinal kind. The latter would have been much more powerful and useful towards isolating casual influences more precisely.

In summary, it is evaluated that much gain has been made in terms of the refinement of our thinking about and knowledge of sex-role identity traits and types, and the various resulting relationship satisfaction outcomes.

10.3.2 Measuring instruments

Well-known, widely-used international instruments for measuring sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction proved to be still setting the standard in terms of reliability and validity. Although the current study was designed to develop and investigate the usage of local, shorter alternative instruments, the findings indicated that the *BSRI* and *DAS* could not be improved on. They have been used, therefore, in the analyses evaluating the functioning of the main variables of the study. The scales developed for the present study were applied, instead, as external validation criteria to confirm the soundness of the international instruments. The relevant processes and outcomes documenting this aspect are fully recorded in Sections 5.2.7 and 9.1, and Chapter 7 as a whole.

The most important gain from attempting to provide local instruments was that more concise, reasonably reliable and valid alternatives were provided. These can serve as easily applied, economic instruments for purposes of preliminary assessment or screening of various kinds, or again, as external validation criteria.

A special note is warranted with regard to employing the measurement of **ascribed** sex-role identity during analyses (in which partners rate each other's sex-role identity functioning). Some previous research findings suggest that this construct is rather important (see Section 6.3.4). However, analyses from the present study almost consistently revealed that **self-rated** sex-role identity is associated more strongly with relationship satisfaction (see Tables 9.34, 9.36, 9.39, 9.40, and 9.63). As a result, this variable was dropped from analyses from a certain point onwards, and could well have been left out altogether from the outset of the study, because of the additional complexity it added to the theoretical models, in addition to multiplying the number of analyses required. However, the findings recorded in Table 9.72 suggest that ascribed sex-role identity is important when evaluating the association between personal relationship satisfaction levels, and perceived or ascribed dyadic sex-role identity combinations. This aspect deserves further attention in future studies.

With regard to the assessment of extraneous variables, no problems have been experienced with the constructs that can be considered demographic in nature, such as income, family stage, and other similar ones. However, certain intra- and inter-personal variables are most likely also fairly complex, composite constructs in their own right, deserving fuller scales, instead of single-item responses. Nevertheless, the expected relationships and correlations have been observed throughout, resulting in some confidence in the usefulness of such items, even if employing such very limited indicators could be quite unreliable and invalid. This route had to be followed, though, because of attempts to cover as many as possible of the extraneous factors that could have an impact on the main research variables, as these have not been identified clearly beforehand. However, in hindsight, it may also have made sense to have better measures of only a few selected core factors considered to be most

important, albeit partly subjectively. Such factors would include conflict-handling and communication skills, extraversion, emotional functioning, and life-satisfaction. This strategy would also have reduced the sheer volume of calculations resulting from analysing the effects of these extraneous factors.

10.3.3 Sample

The single greatest difficulty related to the sample of respondents of the present study is not its width of coverage, but the sample size. It has turned out to be extremely difficult to interest and involve participants at the dyadic level, that is, as couples. This all-or-nothing principle resulted in the loss of potential data from many individuals who showed interest in the research. However, because the study focuses on the simultaneous outcome of relationship satisfaction level between the partners in couples, in its association with the existence of sex-role identity patterns between the partners, it was impossible to make compromises in this respect. The result was that the eventual sample size fell short with the data of about 30 couples, compared against the targets that had been set for the study.

A related difficulty has been the very low returns by working through institutions, such as welfare and non-government organisations. The main problem in this regard was that the researcher could not have direct contact with the clients of such organisations, for reasons of confidentiality, for instance. Instead, use had to be made of go-betweens, who could obviously not ensure free access to records or clients, but only, at most, distribute invitations for voluntary participation, and secure eventual contacts.

The latter situation also resulted in below-target returns of responses from couples undergoing therapy of some kind related to problems in their relationships. As a consequence, a sub-group or sub-sample comprising couples in need of therapy or counselling, assumed to experience low levels of relationship satisfaction, could not be put together. However, through random effects, enough individual partners and couples were fortunately included in the dataset to enable analyses across a wide range of relationship satisfaction levels.

Although the data collection stage has not fulfilled the few expectations discussed up to this point, it has nevertheless enabled meeting the remaining targets. The highly satisfactory coverage across the non-heterosexual and non-marital target populations (in response to calls made in Sections 3.2.1, 5.1.3, and 5.2.5), has already been referred to. In addition, students have not been involved as an easily available sub-group (see Section 3.2.4). In the final instance, the dyadic approach and coverage have remained fully intact (Sections 3.2.2 and 5.2.2).

As a result, the dataset, sample and sub-groups are evaluated as sufficient as basis for the analyses conducted and reported in Chapter 9.

10.3.4 Analyses and findings

The sampling strategies one pursues, and the eventual size and nature of one's dataset, always determine the type of analysis that is made possible later. In this regard, certain limitations affected the present research. Some of the limitations were anticipated (also see Sections 5.2.4 and 5.3), and others have proven to be slightly greater than hoped for.

The essential requirement to analyse the data at the dyadic level summarily resulted in halving the units of analysis from 160 individual respondents to 80 couples. This fact often reduced cell frequencies to below viable numbers, and certain combinations could not be compared or analysed meaningfully. Although trends could mostly be studied, (that is, observed relationship satisfaction score distributions could be compared to the expected score differences), statistical conclusions about the extent of such differences became problematic with low cell frequencies. The main reason for this is that analysis techniques are unable to detect large or increasing differences as statistically significant when sample sizes are low or decreasing. This outcome erodes the confidence one should place in the findings at stake under such conditions.

However, given the realised sample and available statistical techniques, all efforts have been made to make the best of the analysis process. The recommendations of Li and Caldwell (1987) and Bowen and Orthner (1983) (cited under 3.3.2) have also been heeded. In response to some of their advice, both simple and direct first-order analyses, based on an explicit theoretical position and accompanying hypotheses, have been conducted.

A first implication or decision was to stick to the implementation of non-parametric techniques of analysis. These techniques are intended for analysing datasets collected under non-randomised designs, where the intention has not been to generalise the findings yet to whole populations. This is typically the case in exploratory research, including theory testing and development, as with the current project. As a result, chi-square analyses, comparing the observed and expected frequencies in contingency tables, compiled according to the hypotheses set for and tested in a study, have been the obvious choice.

In addition, certain parametric and other techniques are known to be robust against violation of some of the assumptions underlying them, for example, random sampling, normal distribution, and equal variances between distributions from different sub-groups. One such robust technique is analysis of variance (ANOVA), which has been used extensively in the present study as a result.

10.4 Recommendations for follow-up research, dissemination and implementation

It is recommended that the adaptive femininity trait ~~theory~~ (see Section 10.1.2) be used in ~~future research and psychological practice~~. In the case of research, it will expedite how data collection and analysis are best directed and structured. In the case of psychological practice, it will facilitate information gathering, decision making, and the tailoring of prevention programmes and interventions.

The discussion in Section 10.1.2, especially with reference to the future implementation of Table 2.2, suggested further research exploration and refinement of the explanatory value, dynamics and

nuances underlying the framework in terms of the functioning of constructs such as accord, discord, acceptance, non-acceptance, identicalness and difference in relation to sex-role identity type (and trait) configurations, preferences of relationship type, sexual orientation, other related variables, and relationship satisfaction outcome. It does appear as if androgyny, along with egalitarian and comradeship preferences, and sex-typed sex-role identity combinations, with traditional preferences, lead to a higher level of relationship satisfaction (as anticipated under 6.2.6, and documented under 9.2.3.2 and 9.3.2.1).

Future research has to identify the extraneous variables that have a bearing on sex-role identity and relationship satisfaction more conclusively. After that, better use should be made of the most important three or four extraneous factors in additional studies. Special attention has to be given to how these variables are best factored into the new theoretical framework and subsequent research designs, and also how to operationalise and measure them in better and more focused ways.

Most of the measurement instruments available in this field of study are widely accepted. However, as pointed out in Section 10.3.2, the findings in Table 9.72 suggest that the role of ascribed (perceived) sex-role identity, in studying the association between individual relationship satisfaction and dyadic sex-role identity combinations, deserves further investigation. So also do the reasons why this alternative measurement mode only functioned more prominently in the comparisons just noted, and not during interactions at the full dyadic or individual levels.

Another methodological matter concerns sample size and analysis techniques. The findings reported in the present study have to be replicated among larger samples. These samples should represent the target population more systematically and more randomly. The main advantages from doing so would be the data's amenability to the application of more sophisticated statistical techniques, and the acceptance of findings with much more confidence, because of higher cell frequencies, especially for critical sub-groups.

The dissemination of the findings is addressed next. Each participant received a covering letter with his/her research material. This letter served two purposes. It arranged informed consent. However, it also ensured that the research was conducted in an ethical way. With the latter in mind, provision was made for participants to alert the researcher about any need for referral or follow-up. Individual participants separately dealt with their personal situations, and feedback has been given on this basis only, unless they agreed to or requested open feedback about their functioning as a couple with each other's consent. During feedback so far, only one back-referral to the couple's family therapist had to be made. The researcher is still in the process of communicating information about individual or couple profiles to those respondents who have indicated their interest in it. This occurred in between 25 % and 35 % of the cases. A template has been developed specifically for this purpose, and participants or couples receive their profiles in writing. The procedures outlined above ensure that the research data and information are disseminated to their owners, namely the research participants.

Because many homosexual respondents had been recruited through web-site invitations and e-mail distribution lists, with the assistance of interest groups and associations furthering gay and lesbian rights, the researcher also undertook to prepare an article, devoid of personal information, for obvious reasons, acknowledging their contribution and support, and summarising the core findings relating to homosexual couples.

10.5 Concluding statement

Similar to the complexities and dynamics involved when two individuals decide to share a large part of their existence with each other in a close, dyadic relationship over a long time, attempts to understand this process are also never complete, and ever complex.

Only hope sustains the aspirations of this study to contribute in diverse ways to our knowledge about an important part of our lives. As indicated in Chapter 1, when interactions get out of hand, merciless and cruel problems arise (Section 1.1). Aspiring and exerting oneself towards fulfilment and happiness, on the foundations of a realistic understanding, bring the prospects of succeeding within our grasp.